3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

774 [825]

The snakes found in the Kashgar oasis are not poisonous, but the people have a certain superstitious dread of them for which it is difficult to account. It is said that if you kill a snake, its mate will follow you about everywhere—haunt you, in fact, like an Indian "sending." As in most Oriental countries, rumours of human sacrifice obtain currency whenever any great building work is commenced. When Major Dockray erected the masts of his wireless station, five miles north of Kashgar, the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages spread it abroad that he had kidnapped forty Turki children and had buried them underneath the masts. He supposed that it was the "Hidden Hand" trying to wreck the scheme, but it was not; it was a very ancient and deeply-rooted superstition. At Kashgar it is believed that the great mud wall of the city contains the bodies of the slaves who died under the overseers' whips while engaged in building it; as they fell, it is said, their bodies were built into the wall. This is obviously a variant of the human sacrifice legend, and probably represents a race-memory of horrors that used to take place in forgotten ages.[1]

773

Since the earliest times the Takla Makan Desert has been the subject of much superstition and legendary lore. The people who live on its verge all believe that great and wealthy cities lie buried beneath its sands, and that it is haunted by demons and the ghosts of the cities' former inhabitants. These are much feared by the "Taklamakanchis" or treasure-seekers who year after year risk and sometimes lose their lives in desert expeditions in search of buried treasure. A remarkable example of the antiquity of the Takla Makan legends is given by Sir A. Stein in *Sand-buried Ruins of Khotan*."[2] While on his way to the Uzun-Tati site north of Domoko on the Khotan-Keriya road, he heard from some villagers a legend of the Sodom and Gomorrah type about the city which had once existed at Uzun Tati. Its inhabitants, they said, mocked at a holy man who had rebuked them for their sins, whereupon as a punishment God had rained sand upon the

[1] When the Grandpass Victoria Bridge was commenced at Colombo, it was firmly believed that two children had been sacrificed to the god of the Kelani River. As recently as the summer of 1924 serious riots, in which six Sikh taxi-drivers were killed, took place at Calcutta as the result of a rumour that certain Sikh workmen engaged in the construction of a dock were kidnapping and sacrificing Muhammadan children.

[2] Pp. 430, 438–9.